

Amphibious Helicopter Assault Ships (LHA(R))

The Navy's next class of amphibious assault ships, designated LHA(R), will take the place of retiring *Tarawa* class LHAs. In addition to replacing the amphibious lift provided by the LHA-class ships, the LHA(R) will launch preloaded assault craft (amphibious vehicles and landing craft), tiltrotor aircraft, helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles, and short take-off and vertical landing fixed-wing aircraft to support both the rapid buildup of combat power ashore and the rapid re-embarkation of the landing force during amphibious operations. As the primary aviation platform within the amphibious task force, the LHA(R) must launch and recover helicopters, tiltrotor aircraft, and fixed-wing aircraft as well as conduct simultaneous well-deck and flight-deck operations day and night. Finally, the ship is expected to have command, control, communication, computer, and intelligence capabilities sufficient to support operational maneuver from the sea/ship-to-objective maneuver operations for Marine Expeditionary Unit/Brigade-size amphibious task forces and other assigned missions in a joint environment.

OSD approved the LHA(R) Mission Need Statement in March 2001. Milestone A occurred in July 2001. Functional design began in FY03 and will continue until Milestone B, currently scheduled for FY06. Although the schedule remains somewhat uncertain as of this report, detail design should start in FY07 with construction beginning in 2009, followed by the first ship delivery in 2013.

TEST & EVALUATION ACTIVITY

To address test and evaluation planning before Milestone B, the Navy prepared a test and evaluation management document to supplement the evaluation strategy that was submitted after Milestone A. The test and evaluation management document is important, since a Test and Evaluation Master Plan is not required until Milestone B. DOT&E held discussions with representatives from the LHA(R) Program Office and Navy staffs to identify LFT&E and OT&E issues that should be addressed.

TEST & EVALUATION ASSESSMENT

The initial OT&E concept emphasizes two planned early operational assessments. These assessments will be largely based on ship plans and specifications, models, test beds, surrogate platform testing, fleet data on fielded subsystems, and developmental testing/operational testing previously conducted on subsystems that will be installed on LHA(R). This process is modeled on similar assessments conducted for the LPD 17-class amphibious ship program and will use functional design plans for the purpose of identifying potential operational deficiencies before construction begins. The Navy and Marine Corps Operational Test Agencies will conduct the early operational assessments with the assistance of subject matter experts selected from various Fleet units and other Navy and Marine Corps Commands.

Early planning and execution of LFT&E for LHA(R) could affect the ship's survivability design. Tasks that should be completed before Milestone B are the surrogate testing, the Milestone B Vulnerability Assessment Report, DOT&E approval of an LFT&E Management Plan, and LFT&E strategy input for the Test and Evaluation Master Plan.



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